

Walker, Mary

Drawer 10c

71 2004 005 00412

Contemporary



# Abraham Lincoln's Contemporaries

Mary Walker

Excerpts from newspapers and other  
sources

From the files of the  
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

Countless other discrepancies were cited as to chirography, chronology, geography and history, but one of the most glaring errors which apparently severely shook the confidence of the *Atlantic Monthly* editor appeared in the May 9, 1834 letter in which Lincoln was alleged to have written to John Calhoun; namely, "the Bixby's are leaving this week for some place in Kansas." How could this have been possible? Kansas was not organized as a territory until 1854. Twenty years previous to this date the area was Indian land. The name "Kansas" in 1834 was restricted to the Kansas River.

Another error almost as glaring as the "Kansas" one dealt with the federal land system of townships six miles square with thirty-six sections that are one mile square. In the same letter dated at New Salem, May 9, 1834 Lincoln allegedly wrote John Calhoun "if you have in your possession or can tell me where you left the certificate of Survey of Joshua Blackburn's Claim, there seems some controversy between him and Green concerning that North East quarter of Section 40 — you remember." How could there be a section 40?

Another error that Sedgwick could not very well live with, although he offered an explanation, concerned a letter from Ann Rutledge where she made reference to Spencer's copybook, when in fact Spencer's first publication on penmanship was made thirteen years after the death of Ann Rutledge.

Worthington C. Ford and Paul M. Angle were likely the most vociferous of all *The Atlantic Monthly's* critics, and syndicated articles quoting them appeared in many metropolitan newspapers and the "letters" became a topic for several editorial writers.

A writer for the *Christian Science Monitor* (December 17, 1928) pointed out that Mr. Sedgwick had exhibited the proper humility but "does that relieve the public mind" and the writer further pointed out that the "public may rule that no editor has the right to be mistaken where material of such exquisite import is involved."

A *New York Times* writer (January 23, 1929) under the heading of "The Romantic Temperament" seemed relieved that the "new storehouse of Lincoln" had been branded fraudulent, because it would leave us (if authentic) with a "slobbering, inflated and illiterate Lincoln."

### Medal of Honor

The highest distinction which can be earned by a member of the armed services of the United States is the Medal of Honor. The award is usually presented by the President, in the name of Congress, to an individual who while serving in the armed services "distinguishes himself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty." Because the medal is

presented in the name of the Congress of the United States, it is sometimes called the Congressional Medal of Honor.

This award was conceived in the early 1860s and was first presented in 1863. The creation of the award went through an evolved process. Senator James W. Grimes of Iowa, chairman of the Senate Naval Committee, introduced a bill to create a Navy medal. This bill was passed by both Houses of Congress and was approved by President Lincoln on December 21, 1861. It was designed for enlisted men of the Navy and Marine Corps.

A bill for the creation of an Army medal started two months later by Senator Henry Wilson of Massachusetts. As a member of the Committee of Military Affairs and the Militia he introduced a Senate resolution providing for the presentation of "medals of honor" to enlisted men of the "Army and Volunteer Forces" who "shall distinguish themselves by their gallantry in action, and other soldierlike qualities." President Lincoln approved the resolution on July 12, 1862.

However, the Act was amended on March 3, 1863 which extended the provision to include officers as well as enlisted men, and made the provisions retroactive to the beginning of the Civil War. This legislation under which the Army medal of honor could be awarded remained in force until July 9, 1918, when it was superseded by a new and revised statute.

After five designs of a medal for the Navy were drawn, the suggestion was made to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton that one would be appropriate for the Army. On May 6, 1862 the Navy approved one of the designs. On November 17, 1862 the War Department selected a design for the Army. The only difference was that the Army medal was attached to its ribbon by means of an American eagle standing on crossed cannon and cannon balls, while the Navy medal was attached to its ribbon by an anchor. Numerous changes in the Army and Navy medals have been instituted over the years as well as the creation of an Air Force Medal of Honor.

On March 25, 1863 the first Army Medals of Honor were presented by Secretary of War Stanton to six members of the Andrews' raiders through Georgia. This raid was perpetrated by 22 Union volunteers in April 1862 to sabotage the important Confederate rail link between Atlanta and Chattanooga. The men disguised as civilians captured the locomotive *General* at Big Shanty, Georgia, which was 200 miles deep in Confederate territory. Under close pursuit by the enemy, the party fled north, attempting to destroy the track and burn the bridges along the way.

After a ninety mile chase the raid ended with the capture, a few days later, of all the men. Andrews and seven others were tried and executed. On March 25, 1863, six of the party,

paroled from a Confederate prison, arrived in Washington to be presented with Medals of Honor.

Following the presentation of the medals, Stanton escorted the six men to the White House for a visit with Lincoln. The Medal of Honor was subsequently awarded to thirteen other members of the raiding party, some posthumously.

On April 3, 1863, the first Navy Medals of Honor were awarded to several sailors for taking part in the attacks on Fort Jackson, Fisher and St. Philip, on April 24, 1862.

Lincoln was unduly lavish in the presentation of the Army Medal of Honor. As an inducement for re-enlistment he offered an entire regiment (27th Maine Volunteer Infantry) the medal. Their enlistment was to expire in June of 1863. Those men who re-enlisted numbered 309. Certainly they were displaying "soldierlike qualities" as extended duty would cause them to face battle action and possible death. Under these conditions they were entitled to the medal according to the provisions of the original law.

Unfortunately, a clerical error led to awarding those soldiers who did not accept Lincoln's offer a medal. This confusion led to awarding 864 medals to one group.

On October 16, 1916 a board was created, under the Army Reorganization Bill, to gather all of the 2,625 Medal of Honor records for study, and 911 names were subsequently stricken from the list on February 15, 1917. Of these, the 864 soldiers of the 27th Maine Volunteer Infantry, along with forty-seven others, were deleted from the record. Two of the forty-seven were William F. Cody (Buffalo Bill) and Mary Walker (a Civil War surgeon), the only woman who had received such an honor. Under the provisions of the act of June 3, 1916 a recipient of the award must have exhibited "distinguished conduct . . . involving actual conflict with an enemy."

No members of the naval service who had received the Medal of Honor were deleted from the list.

To avoid a misuse of the numerous provisions regarding awards, and to clear away any inconsistencies of the legislation that had grown around the army medal, a new act was approved on July 9, 1918, which provided that "the President is authorized to present, in the name of Congress, a Medal of Honor only to each person who, while an officer or enlisted man of the Army, shall hereafter, in action involving actual conflict with an enemy, distinguish himself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty."

On February 4, 1919 a new (second) Medal of Honor was approved by Congress for Navy personnel who met the requirements similar to Army personnel except that the words "without detriment to the mission" were added.

Numerous other legislation, executive orders and governmental board recommendations have been enacted under different Presidential administrations to make the Medal of Honor the most coveted of all military awards.

**Editor's Note:** A book of 1087 pages entitled *Medal of Honor 1863-1968*, prepared under the direction of The Subcommittee on Veterans' Affairs Of The Committee on Labor and Public Welfare United States Senate, was published in 1968 by the United States Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402, price \$4.50. This short article, the information of which was secured from the above mentioned book, only attempts to cover the history of the Medal of Honor during the Lincoln administration.

### Lincoln And A Weather Prophet

Francis L. Capen wished to predict the weather for the War Department, and in a letter addressed to the President, dated April 25, 1863, he stated, "I will guarantee to furnish meteorological information that will save many a serious sacrifice." In the center of Capen's one-page letter appears his card with the following information: "Thousands of lives & millions of dollars may be saved by the application of Science to war. Francis L. Capen. Certified Practical Meteorologist & Expert in Computing the Changes of the Weather."

Apparently, Lincoln considered Capen more of a crank than a scientist (other correspondence seems to confirm this), and he endorsed the letter with the following comment: "It seems to me Mr. Capen knows nothing about the weather, in advance. He told me three days ago that it would not rain again till the 30th of April or 1st of May. It is raining now & has been for ten hours. I can not spare any more time to Mr. Capen. April 28, 1863. A. Lincoln."

Perhaps the Capen episode in Lincoln's busy life prompted the telling of a yarn about "The Weather Prophet." In the year 1863, an article was published in *Leslie's Weekly* magazine (article not located) concerning Lincoln's humor. The fact was pointed out that the President's jokes were like the parables of old, told not for the joke's sake but for lessons of wisdom. An example of Lincoln's humor was related with a story about a weather prophet, which has appeared in several versions in different localities.

Whether or not Lincoln actually told this tale is beside the point, because it amply demonstrates the skill with which Lincoln used parables to illustrate a current problem.

According to *Leslie's Weekly*, Mr. Lincoln was besieged with office seekers when he first assumed the Presidency. One day, when about twenty patronage seekers had taken possession of his office, armed with credentials and perfectly good reasons why they should be given high wage government positions, Lincoln is reported to have said:

"Gentlemen, I must tell you a story. Once they wuz a king. And the king he hired him a prophet to prophet him his weather. One day the king he notioned





Of all the things that **Dr. Mary Edwards Walker** found ridiculous and inhumane in the world, it was the stricture of nineteenth-century women's dress that galled her the most. A physician and reformer, Walker lived her ideals on the issue, going about her business in men's attire and remaining unfazed by the predictable belittlement—from both men and women—that she attracted. A hero of the Civil War, Walker was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, and she proudly wore it at all times.

*Mary Edwards Walker (1832–1919)*  
*Prints and Photographs Division*  
*Library of Congress*  
*9140 Pomegranate, Box 808022, Petaluma, CA 94975*

ISBN 1-56640-467-3 printed in the USA





Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2013

<http://archive.org/details/abrahamlincolnscmwline>

